



INDIVIDUALIZED DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS AND POSTDOCS

INSTRUCTION GUIDE

Graduate students and postdoctoral scholars who engage in career planning and goal setting during their academic careers set themselves up for greater productivity, increased satisfaction, and reduced stress.¹ This process, often known as Individualized Development Planning (IDP), provides a framework for trainee-initiated reflection, goal setting, and productive mentoring conversations. The IDP process helps provide clear expectations for students/postdocs and their mentors and is currently promoted by leading organizations in higher education as a best practice.² IDP is trainee-initiated, meaning that students and postdocs take ownership of and are responsible for the planning process while for maintaining adequate records that can be shared with their advisor(s), mentor(s), program faculty and the Graduate School when necessary. This process also enables programs to conduct more systematic annual reviews and to provide timely intervention when changes or important challenges arise in a student's or postdoc's life.

Guidelines for Students/Postdocs

Use the [IDP form](#) to provide background information, review and reflect on prior goals, and set new goals. As you move forward in goal-setting and reflection, consider the following best practices:

- Prior to completing your goals
 - Think about the ways your skills, assets, values, and interests weave into your goals and possible pathways. One way to do this is to use a web based IDP platform. [ImaginePhD.com](#) and [Myidp.sciencecareers.org](#) are free platforms that include self-assessments and career exploration tools.³
 - Consider at least two career plans. It is important to have career/long-term goals so you and your mentors can evaluate whether your short-term goals will help you achieve your long-term goals. It is important to think about multiple career goals because many students change career plans during their graduate career.⁴
 - Review your milestone agreement and program requirements to ensure your proposed goals align.
- **Make goals “SMART” (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound).**
- **Utilize specific dates and deadlines to convey time-to-degree progress.**
- Consider goals that
 - satisfy important program milestones (e.g., completing dissertation proposal)
 - focus on research progress and clinical/professional competencies, not coursework or grades
 - involve objectives that are important for you to achieve a long-term goal (e.g. submitting a paper for publication)
 - develop skills/knowledge/experiences (e.g. teaching a class, improving writing, gaining proficiency in research method)
- Solicit feedback from colleagues and mentors to ensure your goals are SMART and beneficial to career plans.

Guidelines for Advisors/Mentors/Committees

- Review progress toward past goals and provide constructive feedback on achievements, suggestions, or advice if goals are not met.
- Review future goals to ensure that they
 - are SMART
 - correspond to program's milestone agreements
 - are beneficial to trainee's career goals

¹ Davies, 2006; Ng *et al*, 2005; Abele and Wiese, 2008; Smith *et al*, 2006.

² The Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology, the National Institutes of Health, the US Federal Office of Personnel Management, the Council of Graduate Schools, and the National Postdoctoral Association.

³ [MyIDP---ScienceCareers](#) provides tools for STEM_students to take assessments, explore career options, set goals, and collaborate with mentors. [ImaginePhD](#) is a tool for Humanities & Social Science students to take assessments, explore resources for different career paths, and develop a dynamic list of degree completion, professional, and personal goals.

⁴ Fuhrmann *et al*, 2011.